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SPEECH OF SIR JOHN THOMPSON

IN REPLY TO

SIR RICHARD CARTWRIGHT.

TUESDAY, 28th JUNE, 1892.

House of Commons Debates.

SECOND SESSION—SEVENTH PARLIAMENT.

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Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I find I must detain the House from going into Committee of Supply and ask you for a few moments not to leave the Chair, not at all because the speech we have just listened to contained anything new or true, but because I have certain obligations to express to the hon. gentleman who delivered it which may be uttered more fervently now than if time were allowed to elapse. When the hon. gentleman was good enough this afternoon to intimate that he desired very much that I should be present when he delivered himself as he has done this evening, and that he had forborne for a long time from staying the other business of the House in order that, in the full House and in my presence, he might utter that long preserved, not to say kiln-dried specimen which he has given this evening, I asked one of my friends what it could possibly be that engaged the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) so earnestly and made him so anxious at the closing hours of the session, and when we at least, if not he and his friends, feel ourselves somewhat overtaxed with the exertions necessary to bring the deliberations of Parliament to a close, to deliver himself of a great speech. My friend told me that probably in ransacking his speeches of the past, the hon. member had found that there was some adjective which he had missed, and he wanted to get it into *Hansard*. As far as I am concerned I am gratified that the hon. gentleman has been favoured with the opportunity, although I feel that he has not even found the new adjective, and although we have but heard the old battered stock of superlatives and the old stale invective which has caused this House and the electorate of this country so often to listen to the hon. gentleman with disgust and to regard his name with disdain, though we have had to listen to this on the eve of a patriotic occasion like the first of July, to which the hon. gentleman made allusion at the close of his remarks. I am deeply indebted personally to the hon. member for having waited to deliver these observations until I was present, because it appears I was to be the subject of many of them, but apart from that it was a great delight to me to sit here for an hour and a-half and hear the hon. gentleman with eye and finger pointed to his supporters, lecturing them on political corruption, and to see how they took it without a murmur or a cheer, and to see how the stricken consciences which the countenances of his followers showed mirrored the misery he showed in his. I am deeply indebted for another thing, and that is for the picture which the hon. member presented to us, if not in new tones and colours, at least in faithful and living portraiture, of the faithless Minister, the corrupt politician, the scheming scandal-monger, who goes abroad through this country, and the man who, when himself in office, jobbed the treasury for the purpose of political prostitution, lent the money of the public to banks without interest in order that men interested in those banks might go through the by-ways of the country and bribe the electors to keep him in office. I am obliged to the hon. gentleman for that portraiture, because I know that a great author has said: "Never does a man portray his own character so vividly as in his manner of portraying another." I am obliged to the hon. gentleman for the kindness which he showed to myself, for the care he says he exercised over my tottering footsteps when I entered public life. When I entered public life in this arena, my steps may have been tottering, but, although I had not seen the hon. gentleman, I had learnt of him in history as being one of the most miserable totterers that ever crossed the stage of public life in Canada. I am much obliged to the hon. gentleman, further, for not allowing Parliament to separate, after a session of nearly five months, without his giving us another of those war, famine and pestilence speeches which have so often carried constituencies for the Government. I am obliged to him, when, in reiteration of the denunciations of his country and his countrymen all over Canada, he felt obliged to appeal for support to some authority, he appealed only to himself and read for corroboration one of his own speeches, thus presenting the kind of endorsations which is

known in the slang of commerce as "Pork on Bacon." I am much obliged to the hon. gentleman that on the eve of a patriotic occasion such as the celebration of the natal day of this country he has laid aside the mask, even if only for a few hours, and if, when Friday shall have come, the hon. gentleman will blandly smile with satisfaction, we, at least, shall have upon the *Hansard* the record that here, within a few hours of the dawn of the natal day of this country, the hon. member declared from his place in Parliament, the most public place in Canada, that resistance was lawful to a Government like this, and that men were going about the streets asking how long this country ought to be allowed to stand. Sir, it is gratifying for us to know that he has laid aside the mask, even if only for to-night, and though he may masquerade in other disguises, on Friday next, at least the country and the House will have taken the weight of the hon. gentleman, and will have realized, as we all have done, and as the country has done, that the traitor is generally the truckling corruptionist as well. Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman paid me a very high compliment ; the hon. gentleman, after denouncing his party as guilty of every legislative and electoral crime that a party could be guilty of, turned at last, almost for the first time in the course of an hour's harangue, and pointing at me, declared that I had shown an intimate knowledge of criminal law, and had no doubt been a successful defender of dangerous criminals. Sir, I decline the hon. gentleman's brief.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. You must have the fee first.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I have had some experience, both in defending criminals and in prosecuting them ; I have never shrunk in my calling as a member of the bar, from taking any man's case, no matter how desperate it might be, for the purpose of saying for him what he might properly say for himself ; but I have sometimes spurned the fee of a blatent scoundrel who denounced everybody else in the world, and was himself the truculent savage of them all. I doubt that the gratitude with which I listened to the hon. gentleman's address, will be shared by his followers ; I doubt that they will consider that the occasion was the most timely the hon. gentleman could have chosen. They will think that the hon. gentleman might have got off his address at one of the earlier stages of the business of the House, when he forbore to intrude himself upon the attention of Parliament. I think they will recall this evening the sad fact for them, that he, by his personal influence, by the power of his language, by the force of his invective, and by his close criticism of public affairs in this country, has reduced their ranks by 50 per cent since we met last ; and they will recall the fact that not only did every constituency which he addressed give a verdict against them, but that every city, town and hamlet in his own province which he addressed, gave a rolling majority against his party ; and they will recall the fact that he chose for the occasion of his speech to-day, when they were celebrating another defeat—the wresting of another constituency, almost within sound of my voice, by the Liberal-Conservative party from the hands into which it fell at the last general election. Now, if I cannot elicit from his own supporters the gratitude which I feel towards him, I can at least do this for the purpose of showing my personal gratitude ; although the hon. gentleman supposes, I fancy, that he has reflected upon me, that he has even attacked me, and that, perhaps, he has made me feel badly for a moment, notwithstanding that, I, as a member of the Liberal-Conservative party, owe him such a debt of gratitude that if it shall be necessary to retain the hon. gentleman's services in the party which he does not lead, and which would not have him for a leader, and which barely tolerates him as a supporter—if it be necessary to retain him in that capacity I, for one, will propose a subsidy to Parliament to keep him there. I know, Sir, that the hon. gentleman did not do himself half justice when he declared that the task before him was not a pleasant one. Why, Sir, the hon. gentleman would rather abuse his country and defame it, than eat his breakfast any day. I can tell the hon. gentleman that, strong as his language was, doleful as his forecast was, of the future of this country, alarming to some people of delicate nerves, as it might be if they had not heard it before, as we have so often heard it, language about the future of Canada, about the people who are asking how long this country can stand, and about people who are advising resistance to authority in this country, we, for our part, believe that on the part of the great majority of the people of this country, there is no fear and no alarm. Confident of the position which this country has obtained in spite of the efforts of the hon. member for South Oxford, confident in the path that she has chosen for herself, they are not to be alarmed even by the threats of a leading public man who counsels resistance, and declares that the fate of his country is sealed ; because they know as well as we know, that when the hon. gentleman talks of resistance, and the death of his country, and all that kind of stuff, his courage is all in his tongue, and that the motto which he carries upon his escutcheon is "Words, not deeds." Sir, the hon. gentleman has made an allusion to me which I may refer to while it is in my memory. Having stigmatized his own party to whom he was pointing and whom he was addressing, with every crime in the political calendar, and many in the moral calendar as well, having reminded them of the sad fact that they had so polluted certain constituencies of this country with stolen money, that this Assembly was hardly to be regarded as a representative body, the hon. gentleman proceeded to attack the judges of this country. I have no doubt that the hon. gentleman has good cause for quarrel with the judges. The hon. gentleman has the same cause for quarrel with the judges of the country that the culprit has for the lash which smacks his back. The judges of the country have found him and his party, while their mouths were full of virtue, guilty of every degrading crime which the electoral law punishes and declares to be a fraud, and have unseated in this Parliament upwards of 30 of his supporters ; and the constituencies to the number of 16, taking advantage of that fact, in his own province and in the Province of Quebec, have reversed the votes and repented of the support which they gave the hon. gentleman less than two years ago. But the hon. gentleman having his quarrel with the judges, thought

he might drag me into the quarrel, too, and declared that, forsooth, the judges were not fit people to try cases, because they were not impartial. The hon. gentleman is the only kind of man who ought to try a case, and above all is the only kind of judge who should sit on the trial of a political opponent. He is so pure, he is so above reproach, he is so well known outside of his own province, which those unfortunate judges who are appointed are not, that he above all others made in the same mould—which thank God nature broke when she cast him—was fit to sit in judgment in cases whether political or civil in this country. Let us imagine what the outcome must be, if having judges to hear evidence this Parliament is to be told that they are the most unfit men in the country to perform this duty, because they are men unworthy of their positions, men who do not know the law and who were appointed because they were party hacks. I do not know, I have not looked at the record of the hon. gentleman's appointments, but it may be so as to some. But for the party which is in power now I stigmatize that as disgraceful a misstatement as can be uttered in Parliament, and I have only to appeal to the recollection of every man who hears me to corroborate me in stating that above all other things the late leader of the Liberal-Conservative party achieved public respect for the course he took in selecting proper men to occupy the judgment seats of this country. But, again I say, the hon. gentleman tried to drag me into his quarrel with the judges, the quarrel of a convicted man against the bench, because we all know that when a man has lost his case and been convicted of a disgraceful crime he has but two options—one is to appeal and the other is to abuse the judge, and the hon. gentleman has chosen the latter course. He has dragged me into that controversy for the purpose of making the miserable insinuation that I bought the position I now fill by giving a seat upon the bench to a member of this House. That statement is absolutely untrue; it has not a shadow of foundation. I suppose there are few persons present who know what actually occurred when I was invited to be a member of Sir John Macdonald's Cabinet, and as I am not fond of referring to personal details, I shall not go into this matter at length, but I can say this, as the matter has been brought up for the first time in Parliament in my hearing, that the invitation to come here was not regarded by me as a very tempting one, or one that would induce me to bribe any man to give me a seat. If I had followed my personal choice and inclination of what I preferred—while I do not regret the change I have made—I would have stayed where I was. But the seat upon the county bench which a supporter of the hon. gentleman for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) took, and which made a vacancy which I stood for, was vacated by the death of Judge Campbell, and it was intimated to me not only that my presence would be desirable as a member of the Cabinet and in the capacity of Minister of Justice, but that I would have an opportunity, if I desired it, of standing for the old county which I had always represented in the Provincial Legislature, because it was probable that Mr. McIsaac would be offered the vacancy on the county bench. Mr. McIsaac was the leading barrister and leading counsel in that district beyond all comparison. I declined not once but more than once the invitation, and in doing so I stated that from the knowledge I had of that judicial district the appointment ought to be given to Mr. McIsaac, if he were willing to accept it, regardless altogether of any appointment of myself. Those who knew him, those who knew his relations in the county, and know the way in which he has discharged his duties, will say that I was right and gave sound advice, and they will not, stalwart Reformers as they are to this day, my leading opponents as they are to this day, thank the old-time leader behind whom their friend Mr. McIsaac sat, for the unworthy insinuation, even if it were true, that he was bought with a seat on the bench for the purpose of giving me a place in this House. I dare say if the judge were to express his own opinion, it would be this, that he was willing to accept a seat on the bench or any other place because he had sat quite too long behind the member for South Oxford. Now, Mr. Speaker, we are told that parliamentary institutions in this country are in danger, that this House can hardly be regarded as a representative body, that legislative fraud has been supported by organized corruption, that the Government is silent and its subsidized press and paid supporters are equally silent, and all this because it is said we have refused an investigation and substituted for it a mock trial. I will not make so little of the House as to ask the House whether that statement is true or whether it is false; but I ask the House whether it thinks a man worthy to sit within its walls who stigmatizes as a mock trial an investigation to be held by two of the highest judges of this country, who have not yet taken their seat and opened the investigation. I should like to ask the House if that is not on a par with the vehemence with which the hon. gentleman has criticized these proceedings from the beginning to the end, and not vehemence only but disgraceful unfairness, which has never been paralleled in the history of parliamentary debate. The hon. gentleman denounced the accused person as guilty almost before he had made an answer in his defence, and the judges had no sooner been named by this House and an investigation proposed by which they will take evidence than it is declared that everything is wrong in the country, that the Government is corrupting the country by legislative fraud and authorized corruption, and that the investigation which those judges are going to conduct is a mock trial. Well, Sir, upon that point I have only to add this: I am quite sure that whether those two gentlemen who have been selected are known to the hon. member for South Oxford or not, the people who do know them, and they are widely known in their own province, and well known, too, by members of their profession in other provinces as well, will know how to characterize as fair or baselessly false and malicious the accusation that any trial they are to conduct is a mock trial. Is it true or false that we have suppressed the charge which has been made? Is that statement not disgraceful to the man who uttered it again? Why, time and time again, I have shown to the House, unnecessarily as regards the great majority, uselessly as regards the hon. member for South Oxford, that we have not suppressed the charge, that we have refused to allow hon. members to try a large number of contested election cases, many of which had been already tried in the courts. But as regards anything to connect a member of

this Parliament or a member of this Government with these electoral corruptions, the charges are there and are to be investigated if the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) has the courage to come forward to sustain them; or if he is not simply lying when he tells this House that these charges can be proved. One or the other. The investigation has been refused, Sir, has it? The charges have been suppressed, have they? Why, Sir, there are the charges to-day as framed by the hon. member for West Ontario (Mr. Edgar) as emphasized by the hon. member for South Oxford himself (Sir Richard Cartwright) and in so far as we have changed them, we have simply changed them to conform to the violent language with which the hon. member for South Oxford sought to enforce them; and if they are not proved, the result will be to stamp him with the name upon his forehead that he deserves. Now, Mr. Speaker, in place after place in the charges we have not hesitated to put before this commission these statements that the Postmaster General is charged with a conspiracy to obtain public money for companies, to obtain that money for companies for electoral purposes and for the purpose of corrupting constituencies—although it makes not a particle of difference as far as he is concerned, for he must fall, if it be true, that he was engaged in such a conspiracy whether he used the money for the elections or not. We put that in, too, so that these hon. gentlemen might prove it if they could, and in every respect the charges are just as full and specific, so far as the Postmaster General is concerned, as they were the day they were brought by the hon. member for Ontario (Mr. Edgar). One thing which we have eliminated is the general charge that other persons interested in these subsidies may have given these moneys too, and the general charge that these moneys were used in some 24 or 25 constituencies, and in some three or four elections in each of these constituencies. But, so far as the charges against the Government are concerned, and so far as the charges against the Postmaster General are concerned, they are just as clear and just as precise and just as open for investigation as the day they were made. The hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) challenged me to state if they are vague now. They are not vague now, thanks to the hon. member who made them, thanks to the hon. member for Bothwell who supported them, and thanks to the hon. member for South Oxford who sought to drive them home with invective which he is sorry for now because he cannot sustain it. These charges have been made precise and they have been made specific, and if the hon. Postmaster General is not afraid to meet them, there are three men who are afraid; because they have just sought to shelter themselves on the plea of privilege against appearing before the commission at all. They are the member for Ontario (Mr. Edgar), the member for Bothwell (Mr. Mills) and the member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright). The hon. member for South Oxford has declared that these commissioners are the appointees of the Postmaster General himself. No statement more utterly at variance with the truth can be put upon *Hansard*, because, as a fact, they have been appointed by this House and by a vote of this House practically unanimous as regards their qualifications. The Opposition abstained from committing themselves to the principle of appointing commissioners at all, but every member of the House knows that it was perfectly consistent for the Opposition to say: that if the House should eventually appoint commissioners these men were unfit by reason of this or that disqualification, or this or that unfitness of temperament. If these commissioners were the villains whom the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) portrays as sitting on the bench of this country from one end to the other, if they were partisans, if they were party hacks, if they were men not versed in the law, if they were men not likely to be impartial, every member who sits within these walls was challenged to say so. He had an opportunity to say so; he was bound to say so, notwithstanding he thought that no commission should be appointed at all; but hon. gentlemen opposite did not dare to say so, and in spite of the repudiation of the hon. member for South Oxford, I declare that these commissioners were fully sanctioned by this House without a single dissent as to their fitness or disqualification, and after dissent had been challenged or defied, for I defied it myself standing in my place here. The hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) has declared that the details which are published in his reptile story, in his organ in Toronto, to which organ he says we are so deeply indebted for these disclosures—as we are, of course, also to him, as I have already explained in the opening remarks I have offered to the House—the hon. member has declared that such a set of documents with regard to electoral corruption never in previous times was laid before this country. The hon. gentleman's memory is short. He forgets that about nine times what was alleged to have been expended in any one of these constituencies—saving the election of Three Rivers as to which the statement is very vague—he forgets that about nine times what was spent in the most expensive of these constituencies was spent, at the election of 1887, to secure him a supporter in a county within 100 miles from where I stand, and the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) was not so virtuous or so regretful then.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. Perhaps you would give us particulars of your election?

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I will give the hon. gentleman particulars fast enough, and I will tell him where to find what I refer to. I was about to say, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) was not such a purist then, or was not such a hypocrite then, whichever it may be, and he was not ashamed to sit cheek by jowl with a man who got his seat by the expenditure of $36,000. If the hon. gentleman wants proof of details, he can find them in the election courts which he shudders to think of as being presided over by men of such doubtful character, and after that, if he goes to the highest tribunal in this country he will find the record there, and he will find, furthermore, that that man held his seat by the purest technicality in the world, and that the judgment as to the corruption stands unreversed to this day. Yes, Sir, and more than that, when the appeal from the decision unseating that member had succeeded by reason of a technicality, and that member appeared in the House in the afternoon,

that he was the author of

the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) led the cheers of congratulation which greeted him. If the hon. gentleman wants proof of details like that, his memory can serve him, if he goes back to the record of the London trial and of a good many others too.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. The Lennox trial.

Mr. BOWELL. The Cook trial.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. Yes, he can find the records of a good many others too in which for disgraceful bribery candidates were rewarded by favours from the Cabinet in which the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) sat. If the hon. gentleman wants his record and wants his details, he has only to give us another war, pestilence and famine speech, and he will have enough of them for the night. Sir, I could not help being amused at the story which was trotted out about the "Red Parlour" for the thousandth time here—but, Sir, while that passes through deaf ears wherever it is uttered now, because every one in this country has found out by this time that it is all a phantom, and that the subscriptions which are supposed to have been given by the manufacturers at the so-called "Red Parlour" would not carry any one of the constituencies, which the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) has been accustomed to run for within the last 20 or 30 years—when that is so well known and understood in this country, the way it is echoed and re-echoed excites laughter wherever the phrase is used ; yet the hon. gentleman got one of his sympathizers and satellites to attend to his business in Washington while we were there in April last. He got him to write a leading article in a Washington paper, which greeted us the morning we arrived in Washington, and before we were introduced to the authorities of the United States, for the purpose of putting the subject and the object of our mission just in the favourite language of the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright).

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is making a statement absolutely destitute of foundation in fact, as he knows.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can produce the article and anybody who reads it and who has heard the speeches of the hon. member for South Oxford (Sir Richard Cartwright) cannot fail to recognize the author.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. If the hon. gentleman has been told——

Some hon. MEMBERS. Order, order.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT—that I did so, I would tell him that I did nothing of the kind, and he states what is false.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I did not mean to say that the hon. member for South Oxford was the author ; and if he denies it, I am willing to withdraw the statement that he induced the author to write that article.

Sir RICHARD CARTWRIGHT. The hon. gentleman knows that it is a falsehood.

Sir JOHN THOMPSON. I do not know anything of the kind, but if anything would induce me to believe it, it is the hon. gentleman's denial. What I was going on to say, Mr. Speaker, was this, that the author, whoever he was and there can be no doubt as to who he was reflected exactly the sentiments and opinions of the hon. member for South Oxford ; this is his duty and his work, such as it is, in certain important publications in the city of Toronto and elsewhere. And in re-echoing the hon. gentleman's story about corruption in this country and the imposture of our mission to Washington, of course it could not be a faithful portrayal of his master's words and ideas unless the "Red Parlour" were introduced too, although I suppose Washington would open its eyes to know what "Red Parlour" had to do with it or what "Red Parlour" meant; and so little was known or understood of the term there that the innocent printers published it to the world as the "bed parlour." The hon. member for South Oxford has undertaken to speak biographically of this Government, and he has declared that we have gradually progressed—by rapid stages, but still by stages—and that we began at a period when, as he says, my steps were tottering and faltering, and when he accused a member sitting on this side of the House of being the top of a mountain range of undefined corruption—a submerged mountain top, or similar picturesque language ; there was, at any rate something mountainous about the hon. gentleman's statement, we all knew at the time how much truth there was in the allusion of the hon. member ; but his candour and sagacity are at any rate remarkable for this circumstance, that although he was at that time, and has ever since been accusing Mr. Rykert of being guilty of falsehood, and corrupt falsehood, in all the letters and statements he had made with regard to that matter ; yet now, when it suits his purpose, he quotes the words of that gentleman as a witness on his behalf, for the statement that dozens of members among whom he sat were just as corrupt as he had been, and had been guilty of just as many breaches of parliamentary decorum. All I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that if Mr. Rykert was worthy of the strong invectives which the hon. member for South Oxford has applied to him in times past—and we know that the English language affords no stronger—he is a worthy witness for the hon. member for South Oxford this evening. I have said, Sir, that we thought we knew how much of truth there was in the hon. gentleman's statement ; but until the hon. gentleman and his party went a few stages forward, and we found that, not only in this Province of Ontario, but everywhere else throughout this country, and even in the Maritime Provinces, of which the hon. gentleman has spoken as having been corrupted by Government influences, the money that was stolen from the treasury of a neighbouring province was used to help them in the elections ; until we heard that development, and until we found men sitting in this House by means of that money, we could not suspect how much truth that hon. gentleman had uttered. The hon. gentleman has spoken of railway subsidies. When we consider that one railway company gave for his purpose as much as is alleged to have been spent in all these 25 constituencies, we can see that there was more truth than poetry in the hon. gentleman's remarks about a great mountain range of which Mr. Rykert was the visible top. Now, I have referred to the

only matters that required attention in the hon. gentleman's remarks, and they did require some attention from me as a grateful tribute to the debt which I felt I owed him for the notice he took of me, and for the kind care and guardianship which he has shown for me in the past, but which I trust I have explained to him will not be a welcome attention in the future. I have only to say this, that speaking as the hon. gentleman has done with regard to being ashamed of his country, he has laid himself open to the very obvious answer that the history of the past twelve months has proved that this country is desperately ashamed of him. In the stigmatization and denunciation of his country, its institutions and his countrymen, which the hon. gentleman has used abroad without effect, and which he has used at home with desperate effect to his friends, the hon. gentleman felt that he needed some authority, and he failed to find any corroboration except himself. But, Sir, I venture to say this, that when on the 1st of July, the people of this country will meet in their various gatherings to be addressed by patriotic men, from east to west, while those who speak and those who hear will, I am sure, express, as they naturally would, the greatest desire for good government and good institutions in this country, there is not one of them who has a heart for his country but will repudiate in every breath of his patriotism, every word which the hon. gentleman has used with regard to his country to-night.

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